IN THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application. An identifier indicating the status of each claim is provided.

Listing of Claims

1.   (Currently Amended) A database query set-up unit for combining a set of search criteria in order to set up a database query, comprising:

a contribution stack for storing search criteria provided by at least one user or by the system in order of occurrence, whereby each new search criterion provided by said at least one user or by the system is pushed onto said contribution stack;

means for deriving a current information state from said contribution stack;

means for relaxing the search constraints of a database query which suppress at least one of said set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack when said current information state is derived,

wherein said means for relaxing the search constraints of a database query select the search criteria to be suppressed according to user profiles, and/or according to context information,

wherein an intermediate entry is maintained within the set of search criteria upon altering the search constraints;

whereby said current information state is formed from a subset of the set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack, and said current information state is used for accessing a database.

2.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 1, wherein the

order in which said search criteria are provided by said at least one user or by the system

determines a hierarchy of dependencies between said search criteria.

3.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 1, wherein each

time a new search criterion is provided, a determination is made whether said new search

criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier search criterion stored

in said contribution stack.

4.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 3, wherein

when said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier

search criterion stored in said contribution stack, said earlier search criterion is erased from said

contribution stack, and said new search criterion is pushed onto said contribution stack.

5.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 3, wherein

when said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier

search criterion stored in said contribution stack, said earlier search criterion and all search

criteria that have been pushed onto the contribution stack afterwards are popped from said

contribution stack, and said new search criterion is pushed onto said contribution stack.

6.   (Canceled)

7.   (Canceled)

8.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 1, wherein at

least the most recent search criterion stored in said contribution stack is suppressed when said

current information state is derived.

9.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 1, wherein at

least the oldest search criterion stored in said contribution stack is suppressed when said current

information state is derived.

10.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 1, wherein

search criteria suppressed when said current information state is derived are erased from said

contribution stack.

11.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 1, wherein

search criteria suppressed when said current information state is derived are erased from said

contribution stack when the query yields an acceptable result

12.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 1, wherein

search criteria suppressed when said current information state is derived are maintained within

said contribution stack.

13.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according claim 1, wherein said

search criteria are obtained by means of an interactive system based on an artificial language.

14.   (Previously Presented) The database query set-up unit according to claim 1, wherein said search criteria are obtained from said at least one user by a natural language dialogue system.

15.   (Currently Amended) A method for setting up database queries by combining a set of search criteria, comprising:

pushing search criteria provided by a criteria source onto a contribution stack in the order of occurrence;

deriving a current information state from said contribution stack ,

whereby said current information state is formed from a subset of the set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack;

relaxing the search constraints of a database query by suppressing at least one of said set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack when said current information state is derived;

selecting the search criteria to be suppressed according to context information, and/or according to user profiles,

wherein an intermediate entry is maintained within the set of search criteria upon altering the search constraints; and

setting a database query corresponding to said current information state .

16.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 15, wherein the order said search criteria are provided by said criteria source determines a hierarchy of dependencies between said search criteria.

17.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 15, further comprising checking

whether each new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an

earlier search criterion stored in said contribution stack.

18.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 17, further comprising erasing

said earlier search criterion from said contribution stack, and pushing said new search criterion

onto said contribution stack when said new search criterion refers to an attribute that has already

been specified by an earlier search criterion stored in said contribution stack.

19.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 17, further comprising:

        popping said earlier search criterion and all search criteria that have been pushed

onto the contribution stack from said contribution stack; and

        pushing said new search criterion onto said contribution stack when said new

search criterion refers to an attribute that has already been specified by an earlier search criterion

stored in said contribution stack.

20.   (Canceled)

21.   (Canceled)

22.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 15, further comprising

suppressing at least the most recent search criterion stored in said contribution stack when said

current information state is derived.

23.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 15, further comprising

suppressing at least the oldest search criterion stored in said contribution stack when said current

information state is derived.

24.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 15, further comprising erasing

search criteria from said contribution stack that have been suppressed when said current

information state is derived.

25.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 15, further comprising

maintaining search criteria within said contribution stack that have been suppressed when said

current information state is derived.

26.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 15, further comprising obtaining

said search criteria based on an artificial language.

27.   (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 15, further comprising obtaining

said search criteria based on a natural language dialogue system.

28.   (Canceled)

29.   (Canceled)

30.   (Currently Amended) A method, stored on a computer-readable medium, that is executed

by a processor to combine a set of search criteria in order to set up a database query, the method

comprising:

        storing search criteria provided by at least one user or by the system in order of

occurrence,

        pushing each new search criterion provided by said at least one user or by the

system onto a contribution stack;

        deriving a current information state from said contribution stack;

        relaxing the search constraints of a database query which suppress at least one of

said set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack when said current information state

is derived,

        wherein said step of relaxing the search constraints of a database query

selects the search criteria to be suppressed according to user profiles, and/or according to context

information,

        wherein an intermediate entry is maintained within the set of search

criteria upon altering the search constraints;

        forming said current information state from a subset of the set of search criteria

contained in said contribution stack; and

        accessing a database using said current information state.

31.   (Currently Amended) A method, stored on a computer-readable medium, for setting up

database queries by combining a set of search criteria, the method comprising:

      pushing search criteria provided by a criteria source onto a contribution stack in

the order of occurrence;

      deriving a current information state from said contribution stack,

      forming said current information state from a subset of the set of search criteria

contained in said contribution stack;

      relaxing the search constraints of a database query by suppressing at least one of

said set of search criteria contained in said contribution stack when said current information state

is derived;

      selecting the search criteria to be suppressed according to context information,

and/or according to user profiles,

      <u>wherein an intermediate entry is maintained within the set of search</u>

<u>criteria upon altering the search constraints</u>; and

      setting a database query corresponding to said current information state.